

Renaissance (Dis)possession (online/Basel, 14 Nov 25)

Departement Geschichte, Hirschgässlein 21, 4051 Basel, Seminarraum 1 / online,
Nov 14, 2025

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57. Basler Renaissancekolloquium HS 2025

Renaissance (Dis-)Possession

Veranstalter: Departement Geschichte und Kunsthistorisches Seminar, Universität Basel

The nature of possession in the Renaissance was to be contested. How could it have been otherwise? A rising merchant class owned more things than ever before, but emergent credit systems led to ruinous loss and repossession. A fractious and divided church alternatively clung to and purged worldly goods, finding new uses for buildings and grounds. The idea of self-possession was articulated as inherent to humanity even as it was denied to an ever-larger number of enslaved individuals. Imperial claims were staked not only through force but also by simple assertion, dispossessing indigenous communities of ancestral lands. Evolving notions of authorship meant that something as immaterial as an idea came to be considered a product of the self, which could unjustly be taken by others. In all of these domains, declarations were met with counter-arguments in constant (re)negotiations of claims of rightful ownership.

The 57th Basel Renaissance Colloquium seeks to reevaluate processes of possession and dispossession. Though the legal sphere often provided a theater in which Renaissance dramas of claim and counter-claim played out, and while this period saw plenty of outright theft, the Colloquium will not focus primarily on legal definitions and decisions. Rather, we are interested in how contesting rights of (dis)possession in the Renaissance revealed or produced epistemological fissures in the "who, what, where, when, and why" of rightful possession in the first place. Possessions could easily become embroiled in dispute simply because the actions of owning, saving, hiding, or retaining were incongruently understood by different groups or within divergent segments of the social fabric. In turn, the very notions of, conceptual frameworks for, and practices of (dis)possession will be our principal concern.

The discrepancies in perceiving and constructing legitimacies around rightful ownership open onto broad historical questions: how were notions of (self-)possession understood, shared, extended, or withdrawn? Under which circumstances was the very idea of possession disavowed or rejected out of hand? How did certain groups assert affiliation to, and singular inheritance of, previous artistic and philosophical traditions? What can incompatible legal codes and daily practices around enslavement reveal about contemporary conceptions of the human? How did

conflict in colonial spaces reveal alternative conceptions of property? And what modes of representation produced either durable or contestable claims to ownership?

Renaissance (Dis)possession is intended as an interdisciplinary forum open to (and seeking to combine) social, political, intellectual, and art historical methods. The colloquium will allow for individual presentations of about 30 minutes in length, followed by questions and a final roundtable discussion.

PROGRAM

14. November 2025, 14.15-18.30 Uhr

Departement Geschichte, Hirschgässlein 21, 4051 Basel, Seminarraum 1

14.15-14.30 Welcome & Introduction

14.30-15.00 Luca Zenobi (University of Edinburgh), Owing the River: Possession, Power, and the Environment in Renaissance Italy

15.00-15.20 Discussion

15.20-15.40 Coffee break

15.40-16.10 Barbara E. Mundy (Tulane University, New Orleans), Aesthetic Excess and (Dis)possession in Indigenous Maps of New Spain

16.10-16.30 Discussion

16.30-16.50 Coffee break

16.50-17.20 Kate Lowe (Queen Mary, University of London), Possession by Category in Renaissance Italy: What Does Actual Ownership of Goods Reveal About the Meaning of Possession?

17.20-17.40 Discussion

17.40-17.45 Comfort break

17.45-18.30 Final roundtable

Online-Zuschaltung: Die Vorträge und Diskussionen können auch per livestream verfolgt werden; eine aktive Teilnahme ist in diesem Format nicht möglich.

Anmeldung: Melden Sie sich für Ihre Teilnahme (sowohl physisch wie im livestream) unter folgender

Webadresse

an:

<https://dg.philhist.unibas.ch/de/forschung/forschungskolloquien/basler-renaissancekolloquium/>

Kontakt: renaissance@unibas.ch

Outline & Abstracts: www.renaissancen.ch

Reference:

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